

OCSPP/RDD Summer National Meeting

Introduction

June 29, 2021

15 min of remarks

Description: Assistant Administrator **Michal Freedhoff** will provide a brief welcome and introduction to the national meeting with OCSPP and Regional Division Directors. This is an internal event.

(Introduction)

- Thank you, Dana, for the warm introduction. Hello, everyone! I'm Michal Freedhoff the Assistant Administrator for OCSPP.
- I'm excited to help kick off your meeting today.
- As our eyes, ears, and voices in the field, we are so grateful for the work you do every single day to protect human health and the environment.
- You identify issues that we face as a nation, provide advice based on your experience working with our stakeholders on the ground, and oversee the implementation of our programs.
- Without you, we would lose that valuable connection with the people our policies and programs directly affect.
- I want to emphasize just how important collaboration and being able to openly exchange information is to our work.
- Your insights help inform our actions and ensure we are on the right track.
- As we strive to refocus agency priorities and surpass our goals, we are going to need your help in engaging local communities and other stakeholders.

(Environmental Justice)

- At EPA, we are charged with carrying out one of the most important responsibilities – to protect human health, with a special emphasis on protecting those that are most vulnerable or have been long overlooked.

- Everyone – regardless of their age, race, income or where they live- deserves the opportunity to live in a safe and healthy environment.
- This means that we must not only weave environmental justice into every decision and conversation, but we must bring all voices to the table.
- I know that as our boots on the ground, you have been doing this work all along.
- You have built relationships with your communities and know exactly what their needs are and how we, as an agency, can better meet them.
- A key responsibility in OCSPP is protecting the environment while ensuring a safe, abundant, affordable **food supply** for all.
- At the forefront of these decisions is special consideration for the people we serve – the communities that look to us for protection and must be able to trust us to make decisions with sound science.
- This commitment includes protecting our nation's farmworkers, their families, and residents of agricultural communities.
- Through the historic 2015 Agricultural Worker Protection Standard revisions, we protect over two million workers from pesticide poisonings and injuries.
- The worker pesticide safety program helps ensure that pesticide products are used 'in the field' as intended – according to label directions to protect those working with pesticides or working or living near treated areas.
- One of many ways that we make certain that farmworkers, pesticide handlers, and others are safe on the job is through EPA-approved certification and training programs.
- As you are aware, the 2017 revisions to the Certification of Pesticide Applicators regulation will improve the competency of pesticide applicators to use restricted use pesticides through enhanced certification and training, resulting in reducing and preventing pesticide exposures and incidents.

- We here at headquarters and the regions have been working collaboratively on the review and approval of State and Tribal certification plans that incorporate these improvements through a Certification and Training Plan workgroup.
- This workgroup meets regularly to resolve issues and develop procedures to address the Agency's process, requirements, and timelines.
- The implementation of the revised certification plans is an opportunity to better meet the needs of the diverse pesticide handler workforce – to have training and examination materials that support pesticide handlers' understanding of the labels and safe use information.
- Greater support of the certification and training programs has been a long-term need expressed by pesticide safety education programs and states.
- We greatly appreciate the sub-leads in regions 2 and 5 that continue to move this effort forward.
- Another critical environmental justice issue that continues to affect children nationwide are the dangers of **lead** exposure.
- I had the pleasure of providing opening remarks for the National Lead Meeting in May.
- A special thank you to our sub-lead, Region 2, for their leadership in bringing that meeting together.
- During my time in Congress, I worked on what would become the 2008 Consumer Product Safety Improvement Act.
- That law established the first-ever comprehensive lead limits for children's products.
- Now at EPA, I remain committed to building on our agency's work to protect children from lead exposure.
- Although childhood blood lead levels have been dramatically reduced over the last three decades due to federal and state efforts to reduce the amount of lead in things like drinking water, soil, paint, and household dust, some children are still exposed to high levels of lead.

- For example, non-Hispanic black children, children living in families below the federal poverty level, and children living in older housing have a statistically significant increased risk of higher blood lead levels.
- In low-income populations, lead exposure remains one of the top childhood environmental health problems.
- These communities still face aging plumbing infrastructure that could contaminate their drinking water; older housing that is more likely to contain lead-based paint; and are more likely to live near ongoing industrial activity or abandoned facilities.
- This continued burden on underserved communities is one of the many reasons why lead is an area of focus for the Administrator and the rest of the agency's leadership.
- One area we'll definitely be moving forward on is last month's court decision to reconsider the dust-lead hazard standards and the dust-lead clearance levels.
- The Court also directed us to reconsider the definition of lead-based paint and soil-lead hazard standards.
- We intend to comply with the Court's ruling and will definitely be looking for regional support as we work on these issues.
- Another nationwide problem that needs our attention is the issue of high levels of **PCBs** in numerous schools around the country.
- PCBs are highly toxic chemicals that have been identified as probable human carcinogens, and may cause a variety of health effects.
- PCB-containing building materials were widely used to build or renovate hundreds of thousands of schools and other buildings from 1950 through the late 1970's.
- Similar to issues with lead, these schools and buildings tend to be located in low-income communities, leaving them vulnerable to exposure.

- Additionally, damage by fires, winds, and floods due to climate change may accelerate the deterioration of aging buildings and increase risk of exposure to PCBs.
- And, as these aging buildings come due for renovation, sometimes these communities can't afford to remove PCBs, forcing buildings and schools to close.
- We have been working on this issue for years, but we need to be more aggressive. I've heard that the regional workload associated with managing PCBs has skyrocketed in recent years as PCBs are being discovered in more and more places.
- That's why we're working with the regions on a FY23 funding proposal to provide regions with FTE and extramural funds to support this work. These additional resources will enable the regions to substantially reduce risks, costs, and current exposures by working directly with building owners to take practical interim measures, and inform communities of their risk of exposure to PCBs.
- We need to work together to reduce and prevent exposures to PCBs, particularly when it comes to workers, children, and communities with environmental justice concerns.

(Scientific Integrity)

- As you know, I am committed to making sure that every decision we make at EPA is backed by science and law.
- In order to solve major issues, we need to trust each other, and ensure that every action we take is transparent.
- Today and always I reiterate my commitment to scientific integrity, communication, and rebuilding trust within this agency.
- This process is well underway.
- We have been revisiting decisions made in the last Administration and have not hesitated to acknowledge and reverse interference by political officials and concerns raised by career staff scientists that were ignored.

- One of these circumstances was the agency's 2018 registration decision for **dicamba**.
- Just a couple of weeks ago, EPA's Office of Inspector General released a report where they found that the past leadership directed changes to scientific documents to exclude some conclusions initially assessed by staff scientists to address stakeholder risks.
- As we stand by our 2020 decision for dicamba, which was made with the input of career scientists and managers, we cannot stand by the 2018 registration decision or, more importantly, the process that was used when it was made.
- We have responded to the Inspector General's report and are implementing several actions to guarantee that our pesticide registration decisions are based on sound science, are free from political interference, and that the agency's scientific integrity policy is upheld.

(TSCA)

- We are also taking steps to restore public trust in EPA and remedy some of the past policy decisions that undermined it.
- One topic that encompasses many of the priority areas I just touched on is our implementation of amended TSCA.
- Under the previous administration, the implementation was not up to par with how Congress expects the law to be implemented.
- That's why we're reconsidering certain approaches applied to the first 10 risk evaluations and all other risk evaluations moving forward.
- This includes taking another look at assumptions on worker use of personal protective equipment.
- This also includes developing a process to ensure that our risk assessments include all routes of potential exposure to a chemical.

- We are also making risk evaluations more comprehensive, by ensuring potentially exposed or susceptible subpopulations are appropriately included.
- Overall, our risk evaluations will be more inclusive of all communities, including workers and fence-line communities, and account for all the ways a person could be exposed to these chemicals.
- A sound, comprehensive risk evaluation helps better protect the health and environmental needs for these communities.
- The regions continue to be vital in our outreach to stakeholders providing the information they need to make protective decisions.

(Climate Change)

- Another key administration priority that we must tackle is the looming threat of climate change.
- The world faces a profound crisis and we must take action to protect our communities from the catastrophic consequences of a rapidly changing climate.
- We are already grappling with climate-related issues, such as changing weather patterns and increasing temperatures causing wildfires and changes in insect and pest behavior.
- Pollution prevention, for example, is one key tool within my office that can help
- We can help businesses change their production practices and operations to be more environmentally friendly and reduce greenhouse gasses and other pollutants.
- I see lots of opportunities where we can use existing tools to inform our decisions and stop pollution at its source.
- One of these is the Toxics Release Inventory program which can identify effective environmental practices and highlight pollution prevention successes so we can continue effective programs.

- The TRI program counts on the regions' support in many areas, from ensuring our data is accurate by assisting with data quality checks to facilities to participating on the National Analysis (NA) workgroup.
- Thanks to Region 5 for their sub lead efforts in this area.
- I understand this is the first time TRI will be featured as a stand-alone session on your agenda - this is a great move forward in bringing attention to all the work we have done and still have ahead of us.

(PFAS and Pesticides)

- Another issue we have aggressively been working to address is the contamination of pesticides with PFAS.
- As you know, this is an evolving issue that has spanned multiple regions, including Region 1 and 3, which will be highlighted in the PFAS session tomorrow.
- The Office of Pesticide Programs' Biological and Economic Analysis Division Lab has been working to test affected pesticides and get to the root of the issue.
- I want to take a moment to acknowledge in particular the work Region 1 and Region 3 have done in collaboration with the BEAD lab, because they have done a wonderful job in assisting with testing, sample collection, and keeping an open line of communication with mosquito control districts and all other affected entities.
- This level of cross-collaboration with HQ, the regions, and states is a great example of how effectively we can work together to tackle a problem.
- We continue to conduct our own testing on affected products and containers and have finalized a method for testing for PFAS in oily matrices.
- We will be ready to share results of our testing and the details of that method soon.

(Closing)

- Over the past almost year and a half, I think we've all come to appreciate that the one constant in life is change.
- We have all adapted in these extraordinary circumstances and continued the critical work of this great agency.
- Your ability to overcome challenges and consistently deliver excellent work is a true testament to your professionalism and dedication, characteristics that make me proud to be a part of this agency.
- It has been an immense pleasure working with you all and I want to reaffirm just how critical you are to the success of our programs.
- Your planned discussions are very timely and important, and I know many great ideas will emerge.
- I look forward to learning what I can do to help as we proceed to implement these programs.
- I hope you have a very productive meeting. Thank you for all your work! Now, I'll turn things back to Dana.